

A

# REVIEW

OF THE

# STATE

OF THE

# BRITISH NATION.

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Tuesday, May 27. 1712.

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**G**entlemen of Parties, you must excuse me a-while, Faction and Strife can no more be my Theme for some Time; till at least I have told you my Thoughts upon Matters of Trade, which I think lie just now as it were upon the Point of being dissolved.

It has been of late much disputed among us, whether Trade is in a Thriving or Decaying Posture, but I suppose most Men now begin to be out of doubt about that matter; we would not hear a while ago of the decay of our

Trade, least it should be made use of as an Argument, to prove the need we stand in of Peace; I shall therefore, to please you all, form no Argument of that kind from it; but should I tell you our Trade is Thriving, and under no general Decay, *I must Lye*, and *Lye* against that Principle, which I think every Man ought to regard; I mean, *Conscience*, and my Discourse shall give no Occasion to Reproach me in that manner.

Those very People, who when they disputed about Peace, would not hear  
of

of our Trade being decay'd — Are of another Opinion now they come to hear of heavy Taxes being to be laid upon Taxes; there is no doubt, but if you go on with the War, you must feel yet more Taxes, and perhaps heavier Taxes than you have yet, and altho' Trade is allow'd by me to be under great decays, and many Branches in danger of being quite sunk, yet our Trade must be Tax'd yet farther, if a Stop be not put to the Annual Expence of this War.

Now as I am not Concern'd in this Discourse about the War or the Peace, but about Trade, and the manner of Taxing our Trade, so I am to suppose for that purpose, the War going on, and Taxes every Year laying upon us.

This brings me back to my first Proposition, *viz.* That in laying Taxes, the proper Maxims of Polity should be observ'd, such as these; *to Tax every Thing by just Proportions and Equalities*; These Proportions, &c. respect the Nature and Quality of what is to be Tax'd: How they stand with Respect to the Nation, how to Trade, how to one another, and lastly, how to themselves.

1. *In respect to the Nation*, regard is to be had to every Branch to be Tax'd, that the General Stock suffer no Depredation, or receive no Blow Ruinous to itself — This, I mean, so, as to be Oppressing to this or that Branch, whether of Trade, so as to interrupt the Importation of Produce, so as to lessen the Consumption, or of Land, so, as to discourage Husbandry and Industry.
2. *In respect to Trade*, regard is to be had, how every Branch to be Tax'd, respects the General Article of Commerce; if Importation be interrupted, Navigation is hindred,

*Exportation is lessened, Manufactures left on Hand, Employment of the Poor is shortened, and the whole Trade is Wounded.*

3. *In respect to one another*; This particularly relates to the Heads of Things to be Tax'd; for Example, Land set against Trade; Things produced at Home, *set against* Foreign Produce Imported; Things Superfluous *set against* Things Necessary.
4. *In respect to themselves*; That is, What Capacity every Article is in to bear Taxes, that so a Tax may be a real opening a Vein, not cutting an Artery; a letting Blood, not a Bleeding to death.

I humbly conceive that all these Things are to be duly weigh'd, in the Levying Taxes upon a Nation; and had I Time or Room, in the narrow Compass of this Paper, every one of these should have its due Weight in our Consideration. We have mighty Contests among us, whether Land shall be Tax'd or Trade? Which of them bears the Weight? Whether our own Produce or Foreign Importation? Superfluities or Necessaries? And these Debates run us into fatal Extremes: Unhappy Nation! We keep the middle Way in nothing we do: Two Ships Sailing in Company, and having Sea-Room enough to keep at proper distance, make their Voyage Comfortable, but if they run foul on one another, they Ruin themselves: The Answer is clear in the Case of Taxing: as our Affairs are stated, *all these must be Tax'd* — But it must be all in Proportion, and in such Proportions, as respect the Four several Particulars above, *viz.* The Nation, the Trade, one another, and themselves.



The Tradesmen cry out, *Tax the Land*; the Landed Men cry, *Tax your Trade*; the Manufacturers cry, *Tax your Foreign Goods*; the Merchants cry, *Tax your Home Consumption*; the Plow-man says, *Tax your Superfluities*; the Retailers cry, *Tax your General Consumption*: Thus every Man speaks his own Way; but, as Mr. Cowley says of the People asking several sorts of Weather from Jupiter,

*Were I in General Jove's abused Case,  
By Jove I'd Cudgel this Rebellious Race.*

It is a large Field, and I scarce know where to begin; but as I am an Advocate for Trade, I must speak to that first, and perhaps in speaking to that, all the rest may have a touch in their Proportion.

I lay my Foundations upon two Maxims, which the Matter of Fact will either prove or disprove upon a very brief Examination, viz. 1. *Trade is already Tax'd more than its Proportion, of all the Articles which we have to lay Taxes upon*: In the Prosecuting my Observations on this Head, I have only to premise here, that when I say *Trade*, I mean our *Foreign Trade*, or such of our *Home Trade*, as is carried on by Navigation—I allow, that there are some Taxes upon our *Home Trade*, which I shall bring honestly into the Scale: The *Second Maxim* I build upon, is, *That the Superfluities of our Foreign Trade are already Tax'd to the Utmost; and that any further Tax must be, speaking in the Language of Trade, their Destruction.*

Here now, I must be allow'd a Digression upon the Word *Superfluities*; viz. That when we talk of *Superfluities* Respecting the Health, Luxury, Vanity, Pride, Expence, and perhaps Morals of a Nation, there are many Things which it might be Prudence in a Go-

vernment entirely to prohibit, and others, which it were Wisdom to Discourage to the utmost.

But I am not now about *Reforming* your Manners and Morals, but *Regulating* your Trade, and if I may speak in the Language of Trade, I must bring in your Vices; and acknowledge some which are really Vices; to be vastly Advantageous to the Common Wealth: Your Pride I bring in carrying on your Trade, and your Luxury to be the chief Support of your Commerce; the Fop, the Beau, the Drunkard, the Dancing-Master, are all Fellow-Labourers in Employing the Poor, Propagating our Manufactures, Encrease of Commerce, and Encouraging Navigation: How many Thousand Families are daily Employ'd by the Nameless Impertinences, and Numberless Retinue of the Toilet? What Fleets at Sea, what Families on Shoar, what Seamen, what innumerable Brewing and Adulterating, Rabbles of People are Employ'd, in the Manufacture of the Bottle, and carrying on the Wine Trade.

Since then our Vices are by Necessity, thus made Vertues in our Trade, we must allow those Things we call *Superfluities*, to be *Necessaries* in Trade; and it is manifest, that he who would go about to Reform effectually, the common Vices and Luxury of the Nation, at the same time begins the Ruin of our Trade; and by that Time he has brought us to be a Nation of Saints, will be sure to make us a Nation of Beegars — For, in short, if you were to Reduce Trade to nothing but the Necessary Things of Life, you would Disband such a Number of our People from their Lawful, as they think them, Employments, that their Number would swallow up all the rest.

What



What would become of our *Portugal Trade*, *Spanish Trade*, and *Italian Trade*, if no Wines were to be Imported, but what, as formerly, was sold by the Apothecaries? What of our *Virginia Trade*, if no Tobacco was smok'd, but as Physick, for Necessity? VVhat would become of our Colonies, if Sugar, Chocolate, Ginger, Pimento, and the like, of all which we have no Necessity, were Prohibited?

I do but touch these Things, having a Design to Treat them all at large hereafter; but to bring this all down to the Point I am upon, I return to the Affair of Taxing; if our Superfluous Expence is become Necessary by the Accident of Trade, then, in laying Taxes, we are no more to Load and Oppress our Superfluities beyond their Ability to pay, than we are any other Thing, the Reason is plain, because, in so doing, we lessen their Consumption

and Importation, and thereby lessen our Commerce.

I have spoken already to the Article of Ruining the Funds raised by the Importation of them before; I think that it so plain, it needs not that I should repeat it—If the Duty already paid upon Tobacco, or Spice, or any other Thing, was given formerly as a Security, for the Interest of Money borrow'd by the Publick—If, by laying other Taxes, you load the said Tobacco, Spice, or other Goods so high, that you lessen or stop the Importation and Consumption, this is Robbing your former Funds, and Ruining the Publick Credit.

It is not for me to apply this to Particulars; I am not to doubt but that these Reasons will be of as great VVeight, as any Things, which require their Consideration, that come before the Parliament.

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